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New Designation X  
Amendment of a previous designation \_\_\_\_\_  
Please summarize any amendment(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Property name International Telecommunications Satellite (INTELSAT) Organization Headquarter  
Building \_\_\_\_\_

Office of Planning, 801 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 3000, Washington, D.C. 20002 (202) 442-8800 fax (202) 535-2497

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: International Telecommunications Satellite (INTELSAT) Organization  
Headquarters BuildingOther names/site number: 4000 Connecticut Avenue

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 3400 International Drive, NWCity or town: Washington State: D.C. County: \_\_\_\_\_Not For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_national \_\_\_statewide \_\_\_local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A \_\_\_B \_\_\_C \_\_\_D

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Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

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State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☒

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒  
District ☐  
Site ☐

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

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Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

1

## Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Function or Use

## Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/communications facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

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## Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/communications facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

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INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL, GLASS, CONCRETE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The INTELSAT Headquarters building is a large, modular office building complex composed primarily of 13 octagonal, glass and aluminum-fronted office towers (called pods), joined together by six open atria covered by large glass cupolas. The pods and atria are arranged as two large “arms” ranging diagonally from the building’s main entrance on International Drive. The longer arm, composed of three atria and six office pods, flows downhill in a northeast direction toward Connecticut Avenue. The shorter arm, made up of two atria and four pods, extends southeast in the direction of Tilden Street. Sixteen circular stair towers, made of concrete and reflective glass block, stand alongside the office modules, their rounded contours contrasting with the straight lines and flat surfaces of the office modules and atria. The sprawling Modernist structure was designed to conform to its hilly, partially wooded site just west of Connecticut Avenue. The building has had very few if any exterior alterations and maintains a high degree of historic integrity.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

## Narrative Description

The INTELSAT Headquarters complex is a large, irregularly-shaped office structure, set back from surrounding streets and contrasting markedly from the conventional office buildings, row houses, and apartment buildings that are its nearest neighbors. Its distinctly Modernist architectural vocabulary, emphasizing primarily glass and metallic silver finishes, gives it a “Space Age” appearance befitting its original function as the headquarters for the world’s largest satellite communications organization. The modular, segmented design also serves to deemphasize the building’s overall bulk and to stress its conformity to the natural contours of the site.

The building is situated on an 11.75-acre site bordered by Connecticut Avenue on the east, Van Ness Street on the north, International Drive on the west, and Tilden Street on the south. The site rises some 40 feet from east to west and includes wooded parkland in much of its southeast portion. The building is composed primarily of 13 octagonal, glass and aluminum-fronted office “pods,” joined together by six open atria covered by large glass cupolas. Each pod or atrium has an 85’ by 85’ square footprint, although the corners are cut off to create interlocking octagonal spaces. Flanking the office pods on the perimeter of the building are 16 self-contained cylindrical stair towers.

From the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street, two typical office pods connected to a glassy atrium are visible. The entrance to the building is at the narrow, exposed base of the segment connecting the two pods and leading to the atrium behind them. It is at the top of a grand, multi-tiered concrete staircase. The six office pods ranged from here to the main entrance on International Drive are all four stories tall, and each pair of office pods stands 11.5 feet higher than the previous pair as they climb the hill toward International Drive. The other four pods that extend from the main entrance toward Tilden Street are five and six stories tall. The façades of all of the pods are generally framed on one side by the glass walls of the segments that connect them to the central atria and on the other side by large cylindrical stair towers made of exposed concrete and reflective glass block. The glass block on the stair towers follows the ascent of the stairs in a spiral, zigzag pattern. The office pod façades are composed of window bands shaded by arrays of canted glass panels alternating with plain anodized aluminum spandrels known as Tech Walls. Each window band is covered by three rows of canted glass panels attached to a rigid metal frame, designed to enhance ventilation and energy efficiency. The flat “green” roofs of the office pods include a variety of plantings arranged in circular patterns. Access to some of the roof gardens is readily available from the top levels of adjoining office pods that are stepped above them.

The six octagonal atria are considerably taller than the office pods and are crowned by huge glass geodesic space-frame roofs, which crown the atria like large cupolas. The glass cupolas allow natural light to flood the atria, giving the building a very open appearance despite its overall bulk. The internal configuration of the atria varies, although most (3 of the 5) include rounded central concrete elevator towers with wrap-around staircases and flying metal and glass



INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

walkways connecting to the adjoining office pods. Most also include pools of water on the ground level and green plantings.

On International Drive at the main entrance to the building are three octagonal segments that vary somewhat from the pattern used throughout the rest of the office pods and atria. The main entrance segment “should” be an open atrium, but it is divided into an open lobby space at the ground floor and a reception area and boardroom on the second level. On the top floor an enclosed “moon garden” corresponds visually with the other atria, albeit at a much higher and shorter level. The ground floor lobby is a large octagonal space that connects at the rear to viewing areas along each of the two adjoining pod-like segments where visitors can observe ongoing satellite control activities. To the left (north) is the main satellite control center, while to the right (south) are the communications center and operations center. These centers are all located on the floor below to allow visitors to view the activity from above. The space above these areas is devoted to offices and meeting rooms for Intelsat governors as well as the main governors’ board room.

### **History of the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT)**

The explosive development of telecommunications satellite technology in the early 1960s led rapidly to discussions about the need for an international consortium to own and operate telecommunications satellites as a multi-national resource. As early as 1961, the United Nations adopted a resolution on the peaceful uses of outer space that expressed the belief that “communication by means of satellites should be available to the nations of the world as soon as practicable on a global and non-discriminatory basis.”<sup>1</sup> The following year, the Communications Satellite Act of 1962 was signed into law by President Kennedy, establishing the privately-owned Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT), headquartered in Washington, D.C., to develop a commercial and international satellite communications system. COMSAT, in turn, helped establish the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT) in August 1964 to focus on ensuring that satellite communications capabilities were equitably available to all countries, fulfilling the intent of the Communications Satellite Act that such capabilities be provided “to economically less developed countries and areas as well as those more highly developed.”<sup>2</sup> The public-private consortium was formally established by the telecommunications agencies of 18 countries, including the United States. Within 10 years the membership of Intelsat grew to include agencies from 86 countries, and by 2001 about 150 countries were members.<sup>3</sup>

In April 1965 COMSAT and INTELSAT launched Intelsat 1 (nicknamed “Early Bird”), which became the first commercial communications satellite to be placed in geosynchronous orbit. At approximately 22,300 miles above the earth’s surface, geosynchronous orbit allows a telecommunications satellite to be “parked” in an orbital location that appears stationary over a

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1721 (XVI), International co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space, Dec. 20, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Communications Satellite Act of 1962, 47 U.S.C. 701, Sec. 102(b).

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/289831/Intelsat> (accessed October 2013).

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

large portion of the earth. From that stationary spot, the satellite can serve as a relay station, received signals from the earth and rebroadcasting them so that they can be received anywhere else that is in view of the satellite. Additional satellites in the Intelsat series were launched over the years, providing complete global coverage. Within 10 years, INTELSAT was carrying 5,000 international telephone circuits and had capacity for 20,000 voice circuits and five television channels. Through membership in INTELSAT, developing countries around the globe were able to construct ground stations and achieve global telecommunications connectivity that would have otherwise been virtually impossible in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1980s, when construction of its dramatic new headquarters building was undertaken, there was widespread agreement that the organization had served as an exceptional model for international cooperation. INTELSAT earth stations had been established in 93 member nations as well as 32 non-member countries and 11 other territories. Service was reliable and highly profitable. Around this time, questions began to arise about whether INTELSAT needed to maintain its near monopoly on satellite communications. The U.S. government proposed allowing competition for international satellite telecommunications in 1984, and the Federal Communications Commission authorized such competition the following year. In succeeding years, private ventures proved that satellite communications were a viable commercial enterprise, and over time the need for INTELSAT to continue as an international organization became less significant while its ponderous governing structure became less able to compete with private rivals. In July 2001, INTELSAT was converted into a private company, Intelsat, S.A., which continues in operation today.

### **Site Acquisition and Design Competition**

The sloping, partially wooded site occupied by the INTELSAT Headquarters building previously had been little developed. It was part of the large National Bureau of Standards (NBS) campus that had been acquired piecemeal by the U.S. government from 1901 to 1942. The property on the southeastern corner of the tract, where the INTELSAT building was eventually constructed, was acquired in two purchases in 1913 and 1925.<sup>5</sup> However, no major NBS buildings were ever constructed on this part of the property. Maps and historical photos show that a row of Quonset huts was built near Tilden Street at the southern end of the property, but otherwise the southeast section was left clear.

The NBS vacated the site in stages between 1964 and 1968 as it moved to its new campus near Gaithersburg, Maryland. Plans for the move had been announced as early as 1956, when NBS officials realized the Connecticut Avenue site was no longer large enough to meet their needs.<sup>6</sup> This left many years for federal and city planners to ponder future uses of the Connecticut Avenue property. Several federal agencies considered moving to the site in the early 1960s,<sup>7</sup> but none of these ideas were pursued. Instead city planners envisioned a “major uptown center” on

<sup>4</sup> Ellen D. Holt, “INTELSAT: Meeting the Needs of the Developing World,” *COMSAT Magazine*, No. 10, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond C. Cochrane, *Measures For Progress: A History of the National Bureau of Standards* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 649.

<sup>6</sup> Wes Barthelmes, “Standards Bureau Plans to Move Near New AEC” in *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1956, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Jean M. White, “Agencies Vie for Use Of Standards Building” in *The Washington Post*, Jul. 30, 1962, B1.



INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Washington, DC

Name of Property

County and State

the tract. Proposed elements of a comprehensive plan, issued by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) in 1967, envisioned that “Federal employment would provide the nucleus of a development that would include commercial activities, housing, recreation and parking facilities.”<sup>8</sup>

In March 1968, the NCPC, State Department, and General Services Administration issued a more detailed plan for the southern half NBS site,<sup>9</sup> which included approximately 30 acres and was bordered by Van Ness Street on the north, Connecticut Avenue on the east, Tilden Street on the south, and Reno Road on the west. The plan proposed converting this tract to an international center, which would include space for new embassies and chanceries on its western half along Reno Road as well as a new headquarters building for the Organization of American States (OAS) on the eastern half near Connecticut Avenue. The plan noted that by locating the OAS headquarters building on the side of a hill, it would be possible to meet the organization’s space needs without changing the established height of buildings or the skyline in the area. “By maintaining and enhancing the character and quality of the existing open space adjacent to Connecticut Avenue, this can be a very attractive and prestigious setting for the headquarters of one of the most important international organizations in the western hemisphere,” the plan stated.<sup>10</sup>

The government’s plan for a new OAS headquarters became law with enactment in October 1968 of the International Center Act,<sup>11</sup> which authorized the Secretary of State to convey property on the old NBS site to the OAS solely for use as a headquarters building. The act also specified that the NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) would be required to approve the plans for the building.

The OAS ultimately decided not to move from its downtown location. In its place, the INTELSAT organization proposed constructing its own headquarters building. Accordingly, in May 1982, the International Center Act was amended<sup>12</sup> to allow the construction of a headquarters building for any international organization. In that same year, INTELSAT signed an agreement with the State Department, which had gained control of the property from the Commerce Department, to lease the land for 99 years for the purpose of constructing the building.

Up to this point, the INTELSAT organization had been headquartered in cramped leased space at 409 L’Enfant Plaza SW. It had begun searching for a new location around 1977. Once it became clear that INTELSAT would be able to negotiate for control of the Van Ness property, it began planning for its new headquarters facility. Its specifications for the new building included two overriding requirements: (1) that at least 70 percent of the office space have natural light and

<sup>8</sup> Cited in “International Center statement on behalf of McLean Gardens,” Apr. 21, 1967, in the archives of the NCPC.

<sup>9</sup> NCPC, “An International Center for the National Capital,” Mar. 1968, in the archives of the NCPC.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Public Law 90-553, Oct. 8, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> Public Law 97-186, May 25, 1982.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

view and (2) that energy efficiency be of the utmost importance.<sup>13</sup> Further, the young international organization clearly wanted the building to be a major architectural statement, a distinctive and lasting emblem of its character as a high-tech international satellite consortium.

INTELSAT decided to organize a broad international design competition. Information about potential architects was obtained from all member countries, and a three-man advisory committee was formed to review the portfolios of approximately 100 suggested architects. The panel worked under the guidance of Paul Speiregen, a Washington architect and expert on competitive selection procedures. The panel culled the number of candidates down to 12, and from these 12, six finalists were commissioned to do a series of designs. Each finalist was awarded \$30,000 and given three months to develop a proposal. The finalists were from the United States, Japan, West Germany, Canada, Finland, and Australia. Each presented his design to an architectural evaluation panel that consisted of an INTELSAT chairman, four senior INTELSAT staff members, and three outside architects that had been recommended by the International Union of Architects: Pietro Belluschi of the United States, Michael Austin-Smith of Great Britain, and Marco Zanuso of Italy.<sup>14</sup> Independent cost consultants and energy efficiency experts also advised the panel.

In March 1980 the review panel selected the John Andrews design, and the INTELSAT Board of Governors approved it. Andrews picked the architectural firm of Anderson, Notter, Finegold, Inc., based in Boston, Massachusetts, as his partner. His winning design promised substantial energy savings, respect and appreciation for the natural contours of the site and its extant tree cover, and a striking space-age appearance for the new building.

### **Architect John Andrews (b. 1933)**

John Hamilton Andrews was born in 1933 in Sydney, New South Wales, the son of a stonemason. He became involved in the building trade at a very early age, occasionally helping his father as a laborer, and early on developed a lifelong passion for architecture. After attending North Sydney Boys' High School, he moved on to the architecture department of the University of Sydney. His studies there were delayed for a year by a military shooting accident, which left him recuperating in a hospital. But before going back to school, he gained further practical experience in "bush building" as a builder's laborer and carpenter. After graduating in 1956, Andrews left Australia to enter Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, where he studied under Modernist masters Sigfried Giedion and Josep Lluís Sert.

In 1958, Andrews and three American student colleagues at Harvard submitted a strikingly bold Modernist design proposal to the international competition to design a new Toronto City Hall. Though the design was never built, it drew widespread praise and finished in second place in the competition. Impressed by this effort, Toronto architect John B. Parkin invited Andrews to join

<sup>13</sup> Peter Buchanan, "Intelsat Interlock" in *Architectural Review*, Vol. 180, No. 10, October 1986, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Testimony of David Levy, INTELSAT Corporation, before the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, May 12, 1981, 8-9.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Washington, DC

Name of Property

County and State

his firm. Andrews subsequently spent three years at Parkin's firm, working on such projects as the Sault Ste. Marie Secondary School and the Malton Tower of the Toronto Airport.

After an "architectural pilgrimage" to Europe and four months working back in Sydney, Australia, Andrews returned to Toronto, where he was asked in 1962 to join the planning team for the University of Toronto's new satellite college at Scarborough. It was his design for the Scarborough complex that was his breakthrough achievement, gaining him an international reputation as a leading member of what would become the last generation of Modernist architects.

Ever since working on the Toronto City Hall proposal, Andrews had focused on architectural designs that adapted to the harsh Canadian climate. Perched on a wooded ridge near Lake Ontario, his Scarborough College complex was a sprawling, multi-part concrete building with enclosed "streets" and meeting places that served to keep the campus lively in the cold winters and invigorated it with architectural detail. An iconic trio of futurist chimneys crowned one end of the building, adding monumentality to the complex. The building's elaborate design featured many largely flat, Brutalist-style concrete surfaces but also snaked organically across its unique natural setting. So striking and extraordinary was the structure that *Time* magazine published a four-page color spread of it in 1967.<sup>15</sup> Architect Philip Drew commented in retrospect that the appeal of the complex "lay in the dramatic contrast of an aggressive, utopian architecture and the frigid Canadian landscape, albeit, in the Toronto countryside on the city edge, framed by woods. From the ravine, the blank elevations in poured concrete appeared as a continuation of the slope of the ravine wall, and even followed in plan the profile of the escarpment.... The beauty of Scarborough is that its rural setting counterpointed its strong, anonymous shapes in off-form concrete and inclined, metal-clad, service ways which combine with vernacular nuances and futurist imagery."<sup>16</sup>

The Scarborough College project featured distinctive elements of Andrews' design vocabulary that he would use again with striking effect in a number of future projects, including the INTELSAT headquarters—a modular design of segmented geometric shapes that follows the contours of its sloping site and relates closely to its natural environment. In this, Andrews joined his mentor Lluís Sert and Louis Kahn in creating architectural spaces that emphasize circulation and utility amid imposing geometric shapes. Displaying little concern for changing architectural fashions, Andrews would focus throughout his career on creating fresh environments for working, living, and learning.

Andrews subsequently worked on two Ontario student dormitory projects, one for Guelph University, completed in 1965, and the other for Brock University, finished in 1967. Both are multi-sectioned structures conceived in the Brutalist style. Of Andrews' academic commissions, perhaps the most prestigious was George Gund Hall at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, completed in 1972. The large, triangular profile of the building allowed for a vast

<sup>15</sup> *Time Magazine*, January 13, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Drew, "John Andrews in America" in *Architecture Australia*, Vol. 89, No. 3, May 2000. Available at <http://architectureau.com/articles/flashback-john-andrews-in-america/>

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Washington, DC

Name of Property

County and State

space for terraced studios, known as the Trays, beneath a great glazed glass roof. Ada Louise Huxtable called it “a very powerful building that states its theme and sets its terms with uncompromising clarity.”<sup>17</sup>

Andrews completed several additional high-profile commissions for dramatic and monumental public structures. His Miami Seaport Passenger Terminal in Miami, Florida, completed in 1970, was another segmented and elongated structure, this time with great sloping, hurricane-resistant sheds of poured concrete that were evenly spaced between diamond-shaped lounge areas where ship passengers waited while their baggage was processed. A very different project was the sleek Canadian National Tower in Toronto (1976), a dramatic, needle-like structure that ranked as the tallest structure in the world until 2007.

Andrews moved from Toronto back to Sydney, Australia, in 1970 to focus on work in Australia. His notable Australian works included several that featured design concepts that would see fruition later in the INTELSAT project. For example, Andrews’ King George Tower (Aka American Express Tower) in Sydney, his only major office tower commission was an innovator in energy-saving design, consuming just 60 percent of the typical amount of energy used at the time by similar office towers. The design featured a bare concrete spine, in keeping with Andrews’ many other Brutalist works, but most of the façade was covered by dark, energy-saving Plexiglas, creating a striking “sunglasses” effect. It was finished in 1976.

In contrast to the King George Tower, Andrews’ Cameron Offices project at Belconnen, Canberra, completed in 1977, returned to the sprawling, modular design that Andrews had pioneered at Scarborough College. The structure consisted of seven low-rise office pavilions organized around landscaped courtyards and connected by walkways and pedestrian bridges. When completed, the structure was the largest office building in Australia, accommodating 4,000 government employees. According to Jennifer Taylor, the building was “designed around the architect’s personal commitment to the deskbound office worker and to the role of the building as a generator of a vital urban order,”<sup>18</sup> a principle that would see further expression in the INTELSAT Headquarters.

Andrews did not have another major commission in North America until he won the INTELSAT competition in 1980. The economic downturn in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to cancellation of several planned projects there. Further, the shift toward Post-Modernism left Andrews’ style increasingly unfashionable. He retired from full-time practice in the early 1990s. In Australia, his King George Tower was significantly altered in the late 1990s, and his Cameron Offices complex, despite being landmarked, was largely demolished in 1999.

## Construction and Critical Reception

<sup>17</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “New Harvard Hall: Drama and Questions” in *The New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1972, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Taylor and John Andrews, *John Andrews: Architecture, A Performing Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 137.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Groundbreaking for the new INTELSAT headquarters building was held on July 20, 1982. Construction was undertaken in two principal phases. The first phase encompassed most of the final building, including the complete northern wing of four atria and associated office pods extending from Connecticut Avenue to International Drive as well as the first atrium of the southern wing. Construction of this phase ran from 1982 through 1984, when Intelsat began moving equipment into the building. The organization completed its move and officially established its headquarters at the new location in the spring of 1985. Subsequently, construction began on the second, much smaller phase, which added a second atrium and four additional office pods to the southern wing of the building. Construction of this phase concluded in 1986. The four new office pods were leased out, with the local television broadcast studio, WJLA-TV leasing the two southernmost office pods facing Tilden Street NW. WJLA-TV moved into the new space in 1988.

Andrews' design for the building had clear precedents in his previous work in Canada and Australia, but there had been nothing like it previously in Washington, D.C. His techniques and style meshed perfectly with his high-tech, space-age client as well as the dramatic hillside location. Andrews loved the opportunities that the site in northwest Washington offered. "It is the sort of site an architect all his life looks for, and this time the hill is in the right direction, and the sun is in the right direction, and the trees are in the right place," he told the Commission of Fine Arts.<sup>19</sup> He also saw the planned atria as key elements of the design: "We think that these places in here can be rather special as far as having water in them, as far as having plants in them, as far as being something that is not only an image of Intelsat, but is a proper use of building space and proper attitude towards being responsible as far as the use of the site and the use of energy."<sup>20</sup>

Critics in a variety of local and national publications unanimously agreed that the building was an exceptional and unique architectural statement, provoking strong opinions from those who liked it as well as those who didn't. Even before it was constructed, its design was noted and praised. After the plans for the new building were publicly released in April 1980, *Washington Post* architecture critic Wolf Von Eckardt exclaimed, "At last, a good building!" in his enthusiastic review.<sup>21</sup> "The proposed new headquarters of Intelsat at Connecticut Avenue between Tilden and Van Ness streets is the first institutional building in Washington, or anywhere, to herald a new architecture, perhaps *the* New Architecture," he wrote. Von Eckardt saw the building as addressing three pressing concerns of contemporary architecture in Washington: creating pleasant and healthy working conditions for office workers, achieving energy efficiency, and conforming to an urban setting. "Human comfort, energy efficiency and respect for the site and the cityscape are not separate features of this building, but the elements and functions that form the design." Von Eckardt contrasted the Intelsat design with the recently-built Brutalist-style buildings of University of the District of Columbia, located just north of the Intelsat site across Van Ness Street, which he saw as "thin architectural concepts set in thick concrete." The Intelsat building was far more uplifting, Von Eckardt felt. He quoted John

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of John Andrews before the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, December 9, 1980, 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> Wolf Von Eckardt, "Pods And Pools" in *The Washington Post*, Apr. 19, 1980, C1.



INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Andrews as saying, "This building was designed in a spirit of openness, of optimism, of faith in cooperation between people and groups of people, and the use of modern technology"—classically Modernist ideals.

When the building was completed in 1984, it drew more extended praise. Like many reviewers, Peter Buchanan, writing in *Architectural Review*, was particularly impressed with the building's energy-saving features, noting that "[n]ot only does this result in a building that is extraordinarily energy efficient, but also one that is exceptionally pleasant as a working environment."<sup>22</sup> Buchanan also admired the "conceptually elegant" interlinking of the modular office pods. While noting a typically Modernist lack of tactile human-scaled elements and "too brutally commonsensical" design, Buchanan nevertheless concluded that Andrews' creation was "a very fine building and surely a landmark, not just for its energy efficiency but also as offices that are rich to experience visually and socially."<sup>23</sup>

"In all, Intelsat headquarters is a *tour de force*, as futuristic in its approach to the office environment as in its visage," observed *Architecture* magazine,<sup>24</sup> which devoted an extensively illustrated feature article to the new building. The magazine's reviewer was particularly struck by the appearance of the building as seen by someone traveling north on Connecticut Avenue. "[H]alf way to the Maryland line is a startling apparition: seemingly a huge jeweled fortress with gleaming turrets, set on a wooded hill."<sup>25</sup> Close up, the building had an equally ethereal effect. "From inside, the sun screens [covering the exterior windows on the office pods] are like airy, transparent blinds, the space frames bold yet unobtrusive cages of steel. A soft, ethereal quality is even felt inside the cylindrical glass block towers, which have spiraling concrete saris set around a concrete core." The *Architecture* critic was least impressed with the building two entrances: the back entrance at Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street and the main entrance on International Drive. "The two entries are the building's only nearly symmetrical faces, and its two least successful."

Margaret Gaskie, writing in *Architectural Record*, also noted the ethereal effect of the new building. Evoking "the space-city imagery of *Star Wars*," its "shimmering many-faceted pavilions seem rather to float than to march up the thickly wooded hill on which they rest, despite the sturdy tiered concrete base to which they are pinned by mirrored cylindrical stair towers." Gaskie quoted Andrews as insisting that the new building was "a reasonable statement that Modernism is not dead" and observed that Andrews' focus on problem solving and serving the needs of the building's users fit the Modernist mold. She admired his "uncanny ability to expose the often conflicting issues that shape a building and, at the same time, coopt them as mutually reinforcing contributors to a whole."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Buchanan, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Buchanan, 108.

<sup>24</sup> "High-Tech Castle On a Wooded Hill" in *Architecture: The AIA Journal*, Vol. 74, Nov. 1985, 75.

<sup>25</sup> "High-Tech Castle," 68.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Gaskie, "Uncommon Sense: INTELSAT Headquarters Building" in *Architectural Record*, Vol. 173, Oct. 1985.



INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Washington, DC

Name of Property

County and State

*Washington Post* architecture critic Benjamin Forgey reviewed the Intelsat building in January 1985, calling it a “space-age stunner.” “The new headquarters for Intelsat, the international telecommunications satellite organization, is without question the most provocative building ever to wind its way up a Washington hill,” he wrote.<sup>27</sup> Forgey noted that the building was controversial, quickly becoming “an object of intense dislike, or affection” and concluded that “Any building capable of stimulating such immediate, strong and contradictory reactions cannot be all bad, or all good. Intelsat is not a masterpiece, but it is in many ways an admirable and even a likable structure, and its complexities and ironies are worth careful examination.” Forgey concluded that the building’s weakest aspect was its interaction with its surrounding setting. As a jewel in a green setting, it was “perhaps the least Washington-like building ever imagined,” harkening back to the qualities that Wolf Von Eckardt had found so exhilarating when he first reviewed its design. Like others, Forgey found the building’s rear entrance at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street “misleading” because most visitors actually needed to go around to the main entrance on International Drive and couldn’t use the entrance atop the grand staircase that appeared so inviting on the corner. Having laid out his major complaints, Forgey went on to discuss what he felt were its great stylistic strengths:

*What building in Washington, excepting the Smithsonian Castle, has a more active, picturesque profile? What Queen Anne house has more handsome turrets or bays than Intelsat’s cylindrical, nearly free-standing stairwells? What rambling Victorian-era mansion has a more interesting set of gables than the many-sided glass roofs of Intelsat’s atria? And those delicate ribbon sun screens and reflective glass blocks—are they not very like the lively mix of textures we so admire in buildings of the Shingle style?*

Having noted its whimsical, Romantic appeal, Forgey was quick to admit that Andrews, as a “hard-line” Modernist, would never agree with his interpretation. He went on to enumerate some of the building’s energy-saving features, concluding that “Intelsat is an engineering feat and a Washington first—a major building designed with thoroughgoing energy efficiency in mind.” He also found the atria to be beautiful architectural spaces that formed the heart of an excellent interior circulation system. Forgey also remarked that the strong public reactions to the building—like those that had greeted Alfred Mullet’s State, War, and Navy Building when it was completed in 1888—boded well for the future. Observing that “most of us, today, would fight hard to preserve” Mullet’s building, Forgey concluded that he could “imagine, 50 years from now, fighting just as hard to save the Intelsat building.”

The question of placing the main entrance on International Drive rather than at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street had been in part dictated by the building’s functional requirements. As Andrews explained to the Commission of Fine Arts, “one requirement of this facility was it must provide conference facilities for the other international groups on the top of the hill and in providing that space, of course, they must be able to use it without interfering with Intelsat’s operations, so the lobby is rather important to the two groups, the conference facilities, and then Intelsat’s technical facilities and offices.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Forgey, “Intelsat: The Space-Age Stunner” in *The Washington Post*, Jan. 5, 1985, C1.

<sup>28</sup> Testimony of John Andrews, op. cit., 76.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

## Energy Efficiency and the INTELSAT Building

As one of the city's first and most dramatically innovative "green buildings" (a term that had not yet been coined when the structure was built), the INTELSAT headquarters pioneered a variety of techniques intended to gain dramatic reductions in energy consumption in what would become a model for architectural design and building construction in the decades to come. The building was designed to achieve a level of energy consumption 40 percent less than comparably-sized buildings at the time of its construction.<sup>29</sup> While environmental concerns had been raised throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the 1970s marked an era of heightened awareness of the gravity of the environmental problem, both in terms of damage to the natural environment as well as unsustainable consumption of traditional fossil fuels. The publication of the *Whole Earth Catalog* in 1968 and the commemoration of the first Earth Day in 1970 were early landmarks of this heightened awareness. A spotlight was shone on unsustainable energy consumption in particular when key events—the Arab Oil Embargo in 1973 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979—led to interruptions and price hikes for petroleum-based fuels. By the end of the decade, when planning for the INTELSAT building began, concerns about energy efficiency were paramount. It was especially fitting to prioritize the inclusion of advanced energy-saving measures in the headquarters building for an enterprise that represented the cutting edge of modern technological prowess.

Architect John Andrews addressed many environmental factors in designing the INTELSAT building and aiming for dramatic reductions in energy consumption. Examples of innovative energy-efficiency measures that he incorporated into the building's design include the following:

- Passive controls were used for maintaining temperatures in the atria, including reliance on convection. During the summer, prevailing southeasterly winds, cooled by the trees on the southeast quadrant of the site, supplied fresh air that entered near the base of the atria and circulated upward as it was warmed by sunlight. As originally designed, the air also passed over ponds in the atria and outside and was "spray-washed" and mixed with cool conditioned air under the stairwell towers.
- Separate air conditioning units, positioned on top of many of the stairwell towers, provided air conditioning more economically than traditional centralized systems, which were the norm at the time of construction.
- The geodesic space frame roofs over the atria included areas of clear, tinted, and reflective glass that were designed to exclude most of the high-angled summer sun yet admit the lower-angled winter sun.
- The angle of the sunshades over the windows in the office pods also induced an upward circulation of air while providing protection from both summer sun, through double glazing, and winter wind.
- Systems for recovery and reuse of waste heat were installed, particularly to take advantage of the heat generated by computer systems associated with the satellite communications and control centers.

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<sup>29</sup> Buchanan, 108.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

Few if any other major Washington buildings had made such an effort to take advantage of their natural sites to reduce and conserve energy, making the Intelsat building the pioneer for architectural and engineering concerns that are now of paramount importance in new construction. Modern theories of sustainable design as well as benchmarks such as the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) standards were still well in the future, leaving Andrews to address energy conservation goals through a combination of techniques and measures that he had used in varying ways in previous projects in Australia and Canada. The result—though the term was not in use at the time—was the first major “green” office building in Washington, D.C.

### **Recent Disposition of the INTELSAT Building Site**

As previously mentioned, the International Center Act had been amended in May 1982 to allow the construction of a headquarters building for INTELSAT. From a legal standpoint, a further amendment to the International Center Act became necessary after INTELSAT was converted into a private corporation in July 2001 because the act did not allow for a private company to own a building within the International Center complex. As a practical matter, INTELSAT had continued to pay for its lease after July 2001 as it had done previously, and the State Department continued to accept these payments. However, press accounts indicate that as early as 2003 the newly privatized corporation was seeking to move to new space,<sup>30</sup> and the need to change the provisions of the International Center Act became more urgent to enable the company to sell its building. In 2008, the act was amended to allow the property to be leased to any entity approved by the State Department.<sup>31</sup> The official purpose of this brief amendment to the law was to rectify the “problem” of INTELSAT no longer being legally eligible to own property at the International Center, but its major practical effect was to pave the way for the company to sell its building to another private company. In 2012, Intelsat sold the building to SL 4000 Connecticut LLC (The 601W Companies), which planned to renovate it for lease as commercial office space.<sup>32</sup> In December of that year, INTELSAT announced it would move to leased space in Tysons Corner, Virginia, in 2014.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mazucca, Tim, “Intelsat Building attracts secret plans for its future” in *The Washington Business Journal*, Dec. 5, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Public Law 110-249, June 26, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel J. Sernovitz, “601W Cos. to study Intelsat renovations” in *The Washington Business Journal*, Dec. 11, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Neibauer, “Intelsat S.A. makes move to Tysons official” in *The Washington Business Journal*, Dec. 3, 2012.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☒ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Criterion C: architecture, engineering

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**Period of Significance**

1984-present

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**Significant Dates**

1984

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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**Cultural Affiliation**

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**Architect/Builder**

John Andrews

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INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The INTELSAT Headquarters building is significant under District of Columbia Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism), as well as National Register Criterion C (buildings that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values). The dramatically conceived building embraces tenets of Modernism that have few other manifestations in Washington, D.C., that are as masterfully executed. The building's design exquisitely reflects its unique function as a satellite operations center and headquarters for a high-tech international consortium, and its thoughtful placement in its natural setting is a rare early demonstration of thoughtful energy-efficient design and construction. The building's full period of significance begins in 1984 when construction was substantially complete and continues until the present time. The building also meets National Register criteria consideration G in that it is less than 50 years old; however, its exceptional architectural merit and historical significance justify inclusion on the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Places. The District of Columbia criteria do not include a requirement that a structure be at least 50 years old.

To achieve historical significance, a site or building must "possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association."<sup>34</sup> The INTELSAT Headquarters building is substantially unaltered from its original appearance as documented in photographs dating to the beginning of the period of significance. The building conveys its original feelings and association.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The INTELSAT Headquarters building is an exceptional achievement of Modernist style and a groundbreaking early landmark in the District of Columbia of building design and construction aimed at energy efficiency. In scale, siting, form, and architectural detail, the structure admirably embodies the distinguishing characteristics of late 20<sup>th</sup> century modern architecture and thus is eligible for landmark designation according to Criterion 3. While the uncompromisingly Modernist elements, including aspects of Brutalism, have at times been off-putting to conservatively-minded critics, the building's forceful, dramatic, and sophisticated style is one of the qualities that raise it to historic landmark status. Further, the building is in an excellent state of preservation, retaining to a very high degree its original design, materials, and finishes.

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<sup>34</sup> *Guidelines For Completing National Register Of Historic Places Forms*. (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1997), 37.



INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

The concepts of functionalism, form-driven architecture and monumentalism—so key to the Modernist movement—are particularly well realized in the INTELSAT building. Set back and dramatically ascending its hillside site, the building's spaceship-like appearance is striking and has been noted by observers travelling up Connecticut Avenue. It is notably fitting for the headquarters and central operations center for an international communications satellite company, one of the most intensively high-tech organizations that have made their homes in the District. The many-faceted metal and glass finishes of the office pods and atria convey a Modernist confidence in technology and future progress and directly convey the building's *raison d'être*. The building's unique location within a special enclave for international organizations and the effort that the INTELSAT organization invested in seeking out an exceptional architectural statement reflective of its values and aspirations combine to give the building special status as a landmark expressive of its purpose.

Likewise, the building's form-driven design and monumentalism are notable and are hallmarks of the Modernist ethos. The octagonal office pods and atria, the silo-like and almost freestanding stairwells, the canted sunscreens shading the windows—all directly convey their architectural function and the materials chosen for their construction. Conceptually, one can distinguish all the building's major parts and visualize how they fit together, reflecting once again the notable execution of Modernist design principles.

Finally, the building's focus on energy efficiency and employee comfort adds to its importance as a successful architectural realization of prevailing social concerns in the late Modern period. Architect John Andrews addressed the "problem" of substantially improving energy efficiency in inventive and largely transparent ways, through ventilation patterns in the atria, carefully chosen glass types and tinting, the design of the sunshades, and the overall placement of the building on its site. The ways in which the energy problem was addressed in the form, materials, and siting of the building is characteristic of the late Modern style and a rare and notable example for Washington, D.C.

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

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INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** 11.75-acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

- |          |                   |                     |
|----------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: 3 20 331 | Northing: 43 12 468 |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:          | Northing:           |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:          | Northing:           |
| 4. Zone: | Easting :         | Northing:           |

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The INTELSAT Headquarters building is situated on an 11.75-acre site bordered by Connecticut Avenue on the east, Van Ness Street on the north, International Drive on the west, and Tilden Street on the south. Located on Square 2055, the site rises some 40 feet from east to west and includes wooded parkland in much of its southeast portion.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries represent the area associated with the building as described in the statement of significance.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: John DeFerrari, Trustee  
organization: D.C. Preservation League  
street & number: 1221 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 5A  
city or town: Washington state: D.C. zip code: 20036  
e-mail info@dcpreservation.org  
telephone: (202) 783-5144  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)



INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: INTELSAT Headquarters

City or Vicinity: Washington, DC

County:

State:

Photographer: U.S. Geological Survey

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Overhead aerial/satellite photo of the INTELSAT building

1 of \_7\_.

Photographer: Carol Highsmith

Date Photographed: 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: View southwest along the south side of the building, taken from near Connecticut Avenue. Source: Photographs in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

2 of \_7\_.

Photographer: John DeFerrari

INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

Date Photographed: March 10, 2012

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: View southwest of INTELSAT Headquarters from the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street NW.

3 of \_7\_.

Photographer: John DeFerrari

Date Photographed: June 14, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Detail of a typical panel of sunscreens from an office pod on the southern side of the building.

4 of \_7\_.

Photographer: John DeFerrari

Date Photographed: June 14, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Typical stairwell silo adjoining one of the western office pods.

5 of \_7\_.

Photographer: John DeFerrari

Date Photographed: June 14, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Main entrance located on the western side of the building at International Drive.

6 of \_7\_.

Photographer: John DeFerrari

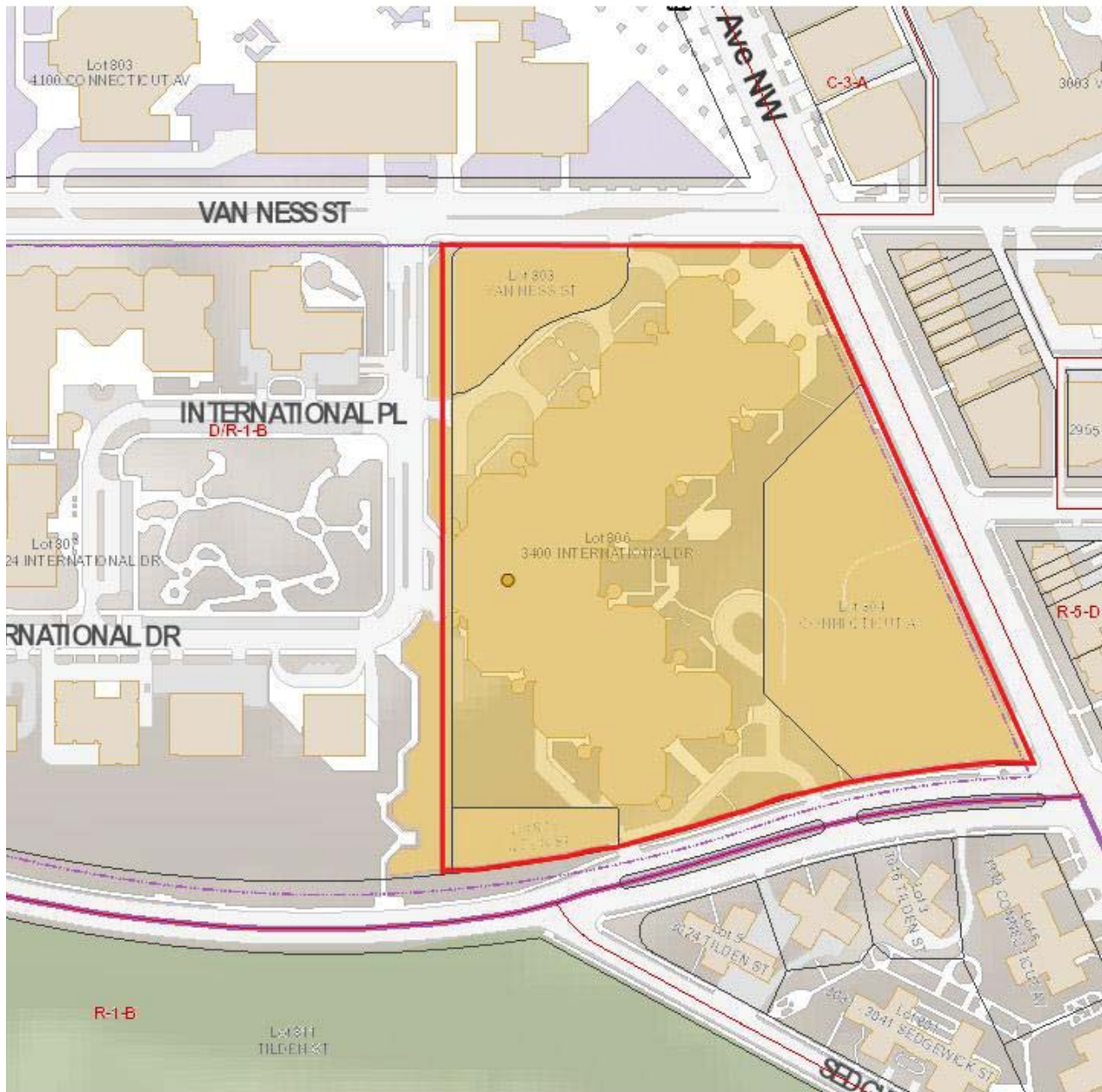
INTELSAT Headquarters Building  
Name of Property

Washington, DC  
County and State

Date Photographed: June 14, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Rear entrance located at Van Ness Street near Connecticut Avenue.

7 of 7



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

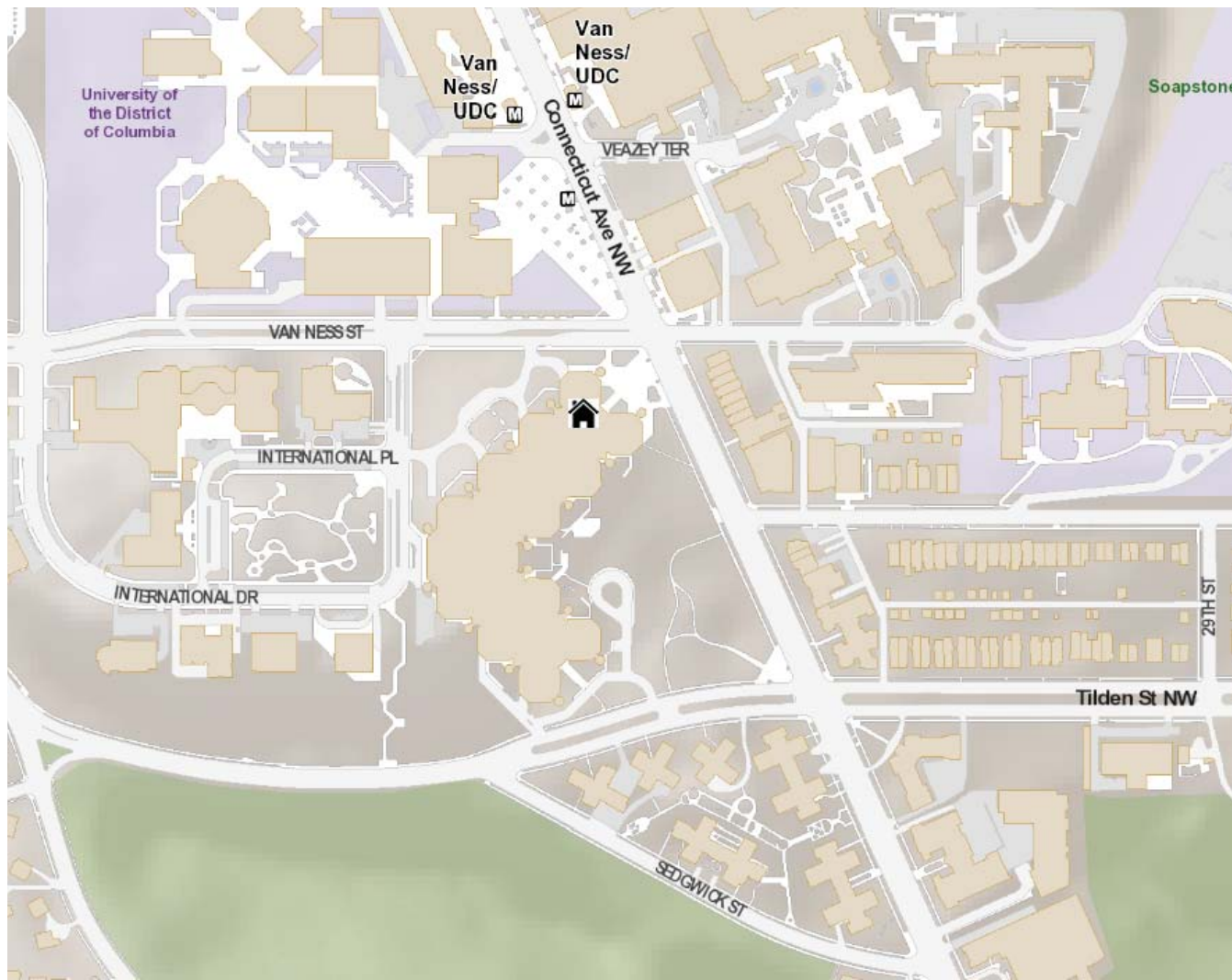
Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 1



Location map



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 2



Photo 1



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 3



Photo 2



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 4



Photo 3

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 5



Photo 4



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 6



Photo 5

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 7



Photo 6



**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

INTELSAT Headquarters Building

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 8

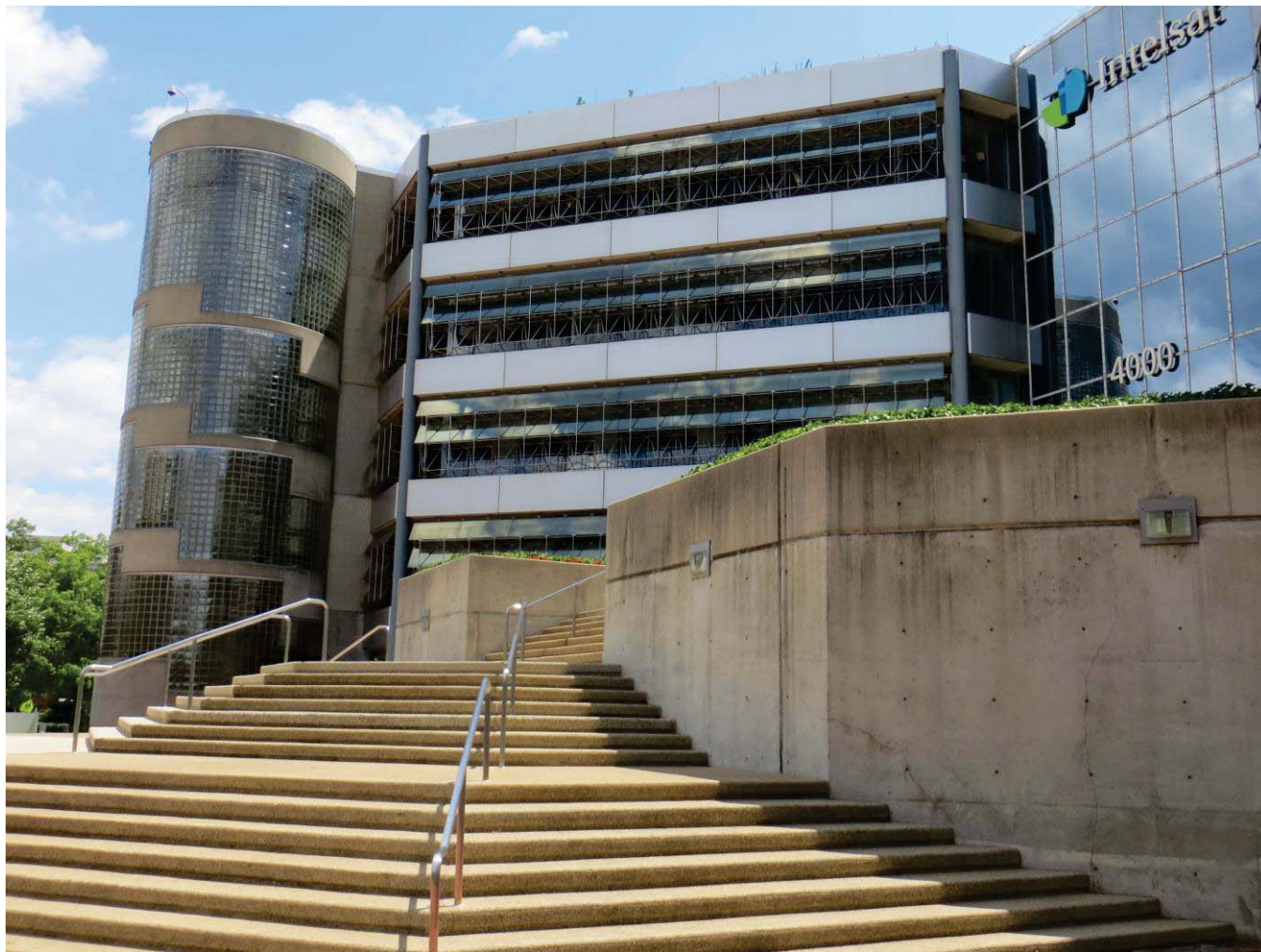


Photo 7